

UUSJ I Believe statement

Good morning! I'm Bob Denniston. For the past 4 years I've served as co-chair of Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice of the Baltimore-Washington-Northern Virginia region, so I have a particular interest in social justice issues. UUSJ is a strong champion for social justice, helping our 20-plus member congregations learn "best practices," build leadership, and share resources. So I found much of interest at this, my 8th General Assembly. Here are some especially meaningful moments:

First -- we passed the **Statement of Conscience on Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice**. Our UUCA Conscious Eating Learning Group had weighed in on an early draft, and I represented our interests at GA, helping to improve the final document. This Statement of Conscience may not be perfect, but it is a powerful platform to address the goals of better health, improved lives for farm-workers, less cruelty to animals, and reduced harm to the environment. We have copies at the GA table in Fellowship Hall if you are interested.

I was inspired by Bill Schulz, former UUA president and head of Amnesty International, now running the UU Service Committee. In his analysis of what determines the success or failure of social movements, he asked us to recognize that the most effective social justice work is truly collaborative.

Partnering allows us to, as he put it, “Punch above our weight class.” That is, to multiply or leverage our impact, especially important for relatively small groups such as UUs.

But I was most moved by the words of the Rev. Victor Carpenter, who received the “Distinguished Service to the Cause of UUism” award, the highest honor bestowed by UUA. He called upon us to:

Rise above the ambiguity of the middle class. Push back against the tides of division and distraction. Understand our moral touchstone to be ‘WHAT are we doing? What ARE we doing?’

Those words made me pause and reflect, re-thinking just how we are making a difference in our congregations and our communities.

So – just what ARE we doing, and WHO are we partnering with? Here at UUCA we have an active social justice program, as do some other UU congregations in the region, but not all. If we want to “Punch above our weight class”, if we want to multiply our impact, then collaboration is essential. To make the difference we seek, we need to gather the collective wisdom and energy of people in our region, and put it to work.

And UUSJ helps to do just that. UUSJ is the magnet, the common thread that allows us to be more effective by

sharing our successes and failures, building leadership, and working together. A recent example is the strong regional UU presence at the Gay Pride parade, organized by UUSJ with the help of several member congregations. Let me give a special “shout out” to Elizabeth Fogarty for her voice and energy that inspired us all.

As co-chair of UUSJ I believe that we are making a difference on topical issues such as the environment, immigration, and GLBTQ issues. UUSJ conducts workshops, provides a biweekly e-newsletter and website to share knowledge and resources, offers small grants to foster collaboration among congregations, and holds an annual awards dinner to recognize the social justice achievements among our congregations. UUSJ is the only organization in this region that exists to promote the cause of social justice among UUs. Social justice requires more than “just us.”

UUSJ can help UUCA and its other member congregations, and you can help UUSJ through Share-the-Plate this month. Thank you for your support.